

# A Soldier Poet in France

Letters of Private Charles Divine, Author  
of "City Ways and Company Streets"

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IN A REST CAMP,  
SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE.

DEAR BILL: I forgot to mention in my previous letters that this camp, which we set up after landing in France, is known as a "rest camp." We do most of our resting on the good old sod, and there is a great deal to be said in favor of it. When you're sleeping on the ground, as we are, you don't mind getting up so much in the morning.

All of our resting has to be done within the area of our camp site, which is a lot of a few acres bordered by a hedge. We can go as far as the hedge, and no farther, unless we are marched out in company formation to go to another camp near by to get our canteens filled with water. We are learning the value of water nowadays. The French civilians can approach the camp as far as the hedge, and no farther.

## French Poets on July 4.

From one of the women, selling newspapers, I got the magazine *Les Annales* of July 14. In it I found a great deal of stuff about the French poets. They turned out in full force, it seems, to celebrate the Fourth of July, which, according to the little magazine, "is henceforth a French fête."

Their poems celebrate the Americans. With my infantile and stuttering command of French I have made an attempt to translate portions of some of them for you. M. Roger Gaillard, who is little more

that 20 years old, sings in this fashion of the Americans:

"The women threw you kisses and roses,  
The men clasped you in their fraternal arms,  
The sun which only shines on noble causes  
Made the blue of Heaven flutter like a flag.

"Thanks for your spirit . . . thanks  
for your embraces,  
Thanks for your cannons . . .  
thanks for your tears,  
In the name of sacred Right, of saintly Liberty,  
In the name of our native country, in the name of Grief.

"In the name of Wisdom and violated laws,  
In the name of Goodness that bleeds and smiles,  
In the name of Reason, by hatred exiled,  
In the name of Hope opening her bruised arms.

"Thanks, brothers, thanks for this gift of yourselves,  
We are marching side by side toward the day!  
The victory, already, you crown and you love,  
For you're fighting for this Happiness supreme:

"Peace imperishable and immortal love!"  
M. Jacques Richepin asks, poetically, if liberty and justice will be dead to-morrow.

But, before the crime is achieved, he says:

"O, great Wilson, your voice arises:  
Here are the Americans!"

## A Tribute to the Americans.

In another poem, called *To the Soldiers of the United States*, M. Richepin also sounds the word "thanks" which ran through M. Gaillard's poem. I have probably incurred M. Richepin's undying hatred for putting his verse into my English. I have probably murdered it; but, even so, it will give you an idea of what a French poet thinks of the Americans.

"And you, too, gentlemen, soldiers of the new world,  
Come to aid us against the unclean beast,  
You have, like Alan Seeger, here with us,  
A rendezvous with Death . . . Salute!

"Thanks!  
And in these two words, no more, said in low voice,  
Our whole soul passes to the depths of you . . .  
See there! It's done. Good brothers now,  
And our two bloods shall be shed as only one.

Why does it wish to spout, this blood of ours?  
To pillage treasures, conquer lands?  
No! If it squanders thus its scattered purple,  
It is because Justice, denied to Right, returns. . . .

"Be proud of this, and more than proud;  
be happy, too,

To have a rendezvous here with Death.  
The Death with whom you have a rendezvous  
Is a virgin with beautiful, bright eyes,  
sweet and superb.  
Our young men, like you, beardless youths,  
Love her with such a love, so pure, profound,  
That all their being is founded on her kiss,  
And in it they feel flourishing, in one short ecstasy.  
The most splendid flowers of the most sublime dream . . .  
Soldiers of the new world, they are truly that;  
Well, you, their brothers, shall be the same,  
When Death shall fix her gaze in your great brave eyes . . .  
And you will murmur, very soft, while smiling:  
'It is good to be faithful to her rendezvous.'  
You will become one of the rays emanating from her,  
And you will reply to her what they told you, too,  
In a low voice, two words, no more:  
'Salute! Thanks!'

That's the end of M. Richepin's tribute. And I wouldn't have bored you with this at all if they hadn't made the awful mistake of giving us too much time to ourselves (for a little while) in this rest camp.

"CHUCK."

## Ballet of the Minutes.

By Benjamin De Casseres.

Monumental, immemorial Minutes!  
Shining oases and poppy wreathed gourd  
across the sand wastes of Time!  
Fragile, immortal ephemerides!  
Writhing prisoners of Form!  
Unkempt, murderous Minutes,  
Marmoreal, hallucinating Minutes!  
This is Walpurgis Night and Kermess Day,  
And you shall unriddle yourselves to me!

I am the Pilgrim Minute of Eternity,  
The Wandering Jew of Time,  
And through all your ancient incarnations  
I have tiptoed down the corridors of your brains,  
Lighted candle in hand,  
Looking for God.

I am the Mirror that no breath can mist,  
Behind the whirl of moods I glow like a full moon, perpetuate, untroubled.  
I may be veiled, but not obliterated,  
For I am the Spectator of Change.

I am Reason—the winter of the emotions,  
Webbed in algebraic formulas, cadenced in syllogisms.  
Over man I have no power,  
For I have no soul.

I am the wanton of your Youth,  
My body is en fête,  
My mind is kermess of Passions,  
My heart a moustrance where the Host of Hell reigns.  
I am Lilith.

I am Ennui,  
The frightful gargoyle that completes the Temple of the Hours,  
Creator and destroyer of worlds,  
The black snowflake.

I was once a fly in the Eupyrean  
And I walked on the ceiling of the Universe flywise  
And glanced into the Forbidden City,  
Since then I am become the Niobe of minutes.

I am Curiosity, the assassin,  
Traveller to Aeternus,  
Dreamer of impossible dreams,  
A Columbus who voyages beyond the Grave.

I am the triumphant archangel of universal error.  
I am the eternal lying logician,  
The first and last Fallacy.  
My hostel is the Ideal.  
My mirror is Man.

## A COWLED MINUTE

At the feast of the Furies the human heart  
is the pièce de résistance.  
Therefore am I the tear that floods the world,  
Avatar of immemorial griefs,  
The almanac of the dead.

## A SUPER-MINUTE

Death can waive me, for in my soul I carry a private oblivion.  
I apprehend and lapse;  
I am the everlasting "To-Be,"  
The perpetual Becoming,  
Imperishable Tantalus-Proteus—  
A thin coating of life over a Lethe that flows into the hollow spaces of Eternity.

## A TWIN-BORN MINUTE

I am Beauty and Death,  
Alternate light and shade thrown by the Absolute.  
When Lucifer was cast into Darkness his brain became a sun—  
Of that star am I twin born.

## A NARCOTIC MINUTE

I am the bloodshot eye of sleepless Hope—  
Hope which is the insomnia of Death.

## A PHILOSOPHIC MINUTE

Pale, thought-in-wrapt,  
Ears a-prick,  
Upright at the heart of Chaos,  
I hear the reverberations of thoughts unborn.  
In the ancient Earth-nebula  
I glimmered for a minute, the time-father of Heraclitus and Nietzsche.

## A GRAY MINUTE

I am Fatigue,  
An eagle that yawns in the face of the Infinite.  
My eyrie is a hen-roost,  
The Azure is a painted awning.  
I am weary of flight.  
Once an arch of the skies,  
My head now seeks the soft bolster of death.

## A SPECTRAL MINUTE

I crossed the threshold of the Ineluctable.  
You cannot see me; you must not know me.  
I am the sensation of the Ghastly, a minute in the brain of Edgar Poe.  
A single time-beat in the consciousness of Chopin.  
I whisper once to every one across the border of the Forbidden.  
You cannot see me; you must not know me—  
I am the Beauty that blasts.

## AN IRONIC MINUTE

I am the last minute that lived in the brain of Christ.  
And my secret is this: "I had not wisdom until Judas kissed me."  
I heard him say that at the end;  
And That Man smiled and died.  
I seek to be the centre of all circumferences.

## AN ARCLESS MINUTE

I am the will-to-immobility,  
Motionless magnet toward which dart all that lives and all that dreams,  
An Infinite Comprehension swarming with nebulous and ended entities.  
I am the miraculous Minute of Plotinus.

## A MURDEROUS MINUTE

I am the brigand Ridicule,  
An antique Wasp,  
The serious Harlequin,  
An abettor of sanity,  
The wisdom of the last man.

## A MYSTIC MINUTE

I am a diver  
And I have foraged in the sunken galleons of innumerable seas  
And rifled the air of its secrets.  
A lizard, too, that lay motionless on the walls of the Elsewhere for an eternity that prolonged itself to a minute.  
I was the fulcrum-minute in the brain of Blake,  
And through me he lifted the stars.

## A NAMELESS MINUTE

The brain is a carcass swarming with the vermin of thought,  
A pullulating grave in which lie a thousand ruined saviors  
And a thousand rotting conquerors,  
The final condensation of a thousand thousand nebulous hates and infuriate passions.  
I am the minute that decided the destiny of Orestes and Napoleon!

## AN ANARCH MINUTE

I hung upon the granite walls of the Caucasus  
And soared as a curse out of the mouth of a Titan into the brain of Jupiter.  
I was part of the imperial consciousness of Prometheus.

## A PASSIONATE MINUTE

The veil of the senses lay furled around my Thought for a thousand years,  
A thousand years the Thought stood mute and muffled in its incomparable majesty.  
Then away! away! we rode like a furious Valkyrie toward—an extinct Valhalla.  
Alas! I was the crowning minute in the brain of Nietzsche.

## AN ETERNAL MINUTE

Like a giant glowworm, I appeared at the zenith of the Night  
And stabbed the dark with my flame,  
And then I was no more in Time,  
And the Infinite Spaces remained as before, eyeless and mute.  
I was a minute caught in a tempest in the Bay of Spezia.

## THE FINAL MINUTE

The Final Minute,  
I dream of the mystery of Time—  
Time, the Ararat of Eternity,  
On whose summit is stranded the Ark of Human Consciousness  
For a Little While, for a Little While.